

# San Nicolas Island

# Takes Out the Trash

## Luau Marks Waste Collection Milestone

**W**hat do you get when you combine 40 long years of Naval operations, 150 tons of trash, more than a hundred volunteers, and an island off the coast of Southern California? Well if you are stationed on San Nicholas Island, the answer would be a luau.

CMDR Ray Schenk, Officer in Charge of San Nicholas Island (SNI), recently held a luau celebrating the milestone of 150 tons of trash being removed off the island. The luau, which was held inside the club on SNI, was complete with leis, Hawaiian shirts and a bonfire.

"When I first arrived on the island I took a walk around and I noticed that there was an awful lot of Navy activity over the past 40 years, but not a lot of clean-up. I joked that it was the island of the blue dumpster, not the island of the blue dolphin," Schenk said. As he was sitting in the club on SNI that night he

decided to take matters into his own hands and to see what he could do about the less than immaculate facility he had been placed in charge of.

Schenk decided to see what kind of community spirit there was in the people who worked for him on the island. So the next day he opened what he likes to call "Operation Night Lizard." Named after an endangered species of lizard on the island, the original intent was to spend some time cleaning up what is known as Nictown—the area where all of the barracks, restaurants and workspaces are located on the facility.

"There were 45 volunteers that day," said Schenk. "Two hours later, we had picked up two tons of trash just from one small area."

Schenk decided to try another cleanup the following week. The subsequent Tuesday, Operation Night Lizard continued. Thirty-six people showed up and, in 90 minutes, picked up more than five tons of trash from around the airfield.

"Every Tuesday, we continued to clean up a different part of the island," said Schenk. "Once we collected 60 tons of garbage, I decided that we needed to update our plan." Schenk closed



SNI Sailors remove old metal equipment matting from a beach.



Public Works and Seabee personnel rig an old launcher for removal from a ravine.



Twenty tons of old missile launcher reaches the top of the ravine from which it was removed.





Island personnel celebrate the removal of a 20-ton missile launcher removed from a deep ravine that marked the beginning of Operation Elephant Seal, the third major cleanup operation to date.

Operation Night lizard and set out a new plan—Operation Decollatta. This operation was also named after an endangered species on the island, a carnivorous snail.

Operation Decollatta required people to volunteer on their own time to stay out on the island on weekends to continue the clean up of more than 40 years of debris that had collected on the island.

“We designed an Operation Decollatta patch like what you put on your flight suit,” said Schenk. “Anyone who worked on the clean-up received one.” The entire medical and weather departments from Naval Base Ventura County flew out to the island to pick up trash. The project took on a life of its own. In January, Operation Decollatta reached the milestone of 150 tons of debris, including paper, cigarette butts, cans and even the carcasses of three aircraft.

“We leveled a trailer park,” said Schenk. “There was a set of seven trailers left to

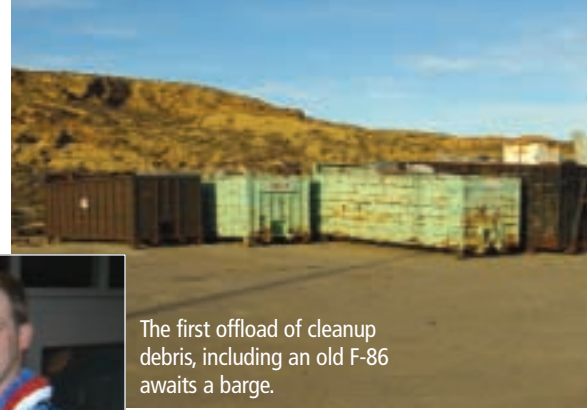


ET3 Cody Cole (right), on behalf of SNI All Hands, presents SNI Officer-In-Charge CDR Ray Schenk with a trashcan plaque for his efforts in initiating the clean-up projects.

rot on the island.” In what he jokingly calls his Anger Management for Sailors, Schenk armed his Sailors with sledgehammers and saws and they tore down that trailer park, making way for a park for recreational vehicles.

At the 150-ton mark, Schenk closed down Operation Decollatta. “It seemed like a good place to stop,” he said. So to celebrate the milestone, a Luau was thrown. “It seemed like the perfect way to thank everyone,” he said.

Of course, 150 tons of trash is a good start but Schenk’s efforts will not stop there. Operation Elephant Seal is the next step in this beautification project. “No dumpster is safe,” jokes Schenk. Operation Elephant Seal will see people volunteering their time to pick up as much trash as they can.



The first offload of cleanup debris, including an old F-86 awaits a barge.



The first major cleanup push involved removing a crashed F-4 Phantom target aircraft from the island.

“It is increasingly important for the Navy to demonstrate that we are good stewards of the natural and cultural resources that we have been entrusted with,” said Schenk. 🚢

*Photos by PH2 Chris Perkins.*

## Summary of Waste Collection Operations on San Nicholas Island

Operation	Waste Collected (in tons)
Operation Night Lizard	60
Operation Rumina Decollata	90
Operation Elephant Seal	48 (to date)
TOTAL	198

## CONTACTS

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